

THE BASICS OF SPEECH 3: PREPOSITIONS

A preposition is a word that connects its object (a noun, a noun clause, or a pronoun that follows the preposition) to another word in the sentence. A preposition is positioned before its object, typically indicating a relationship based on time, space/location, or direction between the object and the rest of the sentence:

To garner more attention, Pauline placed the dead dog **on** her head.

“I need to get to the finish line **before** Sanchez,” gasped Juan.

(In the first sentence, *on* expresses a relationship of location: It tells where Pauline placed the dead dog. In the second sentence, *before* describes a relationship based on time: It tells when Juan would like to reach the finish line. The object of *on* is *head*; the object of *before* is *Sanchez*.)

Prepositions can also express other relationships as well. For instance, a preposition such as *concerning* shows a relationship of logic. Prepositions such as *without* and *except* show a relationship of exclusion.

Some common prepositions include:

about	below	for
across	beside	from
against	beyond	inside
among	by	like
around	concern	near
at	down	off
as	except	onto

Though not commonly regarded, there are three kinds of prepositions: **simple** (*at, as, of, in, for, with*), **compound** (*within, outside, beneath, before, onto*), and **phrasal** (*along with, aside from, next to, with regard to, with the exception of*).

A **phrasal preposition** consists of a simple preposition preceded by another word such as an adverb, an adjective, or a conjunction. They typically follow a verb, taking the form of a noun (or an adjective)

plus a preposition. A few examples of phrasal prepositions are listed below:

ability at	except for	on account of
angry with	grateful to	on top of
because of	in addition to	up to
capable of	independent of	worthy of
deserving of	instead of	with reference to

Constructing the correct combination can sometimes prove difficult, as in the following examples:

INCORRECT	CORRECT
apologize about	apologize for
capable to	capable of
in search to	in search of
interested about	interested in, by
puzzled on	puzzled at, by
similar with	similar to

When writing idiomatic English, care should be taken not to use the wrong combination:

The mosque is **across from** (not *to*) the restaurant.

A **prepositional phrase** (not to be confused with *phrasal prepositions*) consists of a preposition, the object of the preposition, and the object's modifiers. Prepositional phrases may function as adverbs or adjectives:

They are running **away from the bears**.

Yet, the professionals **with curious minds** enjoyed the seminar.

(In the first sentence, the highlighted prepositional phrase functions as an adverb modifying the verb *running*. In the second sentence, the highlighted prepositional phrase functions as an adjective modifying the noun *professionals*.)

Note that a preposition without an object can still be used as an adverb:

Jackson never heard the composition **before**.

(The object of the preposition *before* is not stated, but understood: before *today* or before *this time*. The preposition *before* modifies the verb *heard*, and hence functions as an adverb.)

It is helpful to identify prepositional phrases in sentences since any noun or pronoun within the prepositional phrase must be the object of the preposition, and not the direct object of the verb.

We walked **to the park**.

We rode our **bicycles to the mechanic's shop**.

(In the first sentence, *to the park* is a prepositional phrase. *park* is the object of the preposition *to*, and not the direct object to the verb *walked*. In the second sentence, *bicycles* is the direct object of the verb *rode*. *to the mechanic's shop* is the prepositional phrase. *mechanic's shop* is the object of the preposition *to*, and not the direct object of the verb *rode*.)

Prepositions of Time

PREPOSITION	HOW IT IS USED	EXAMPLE
<i>x ago</i>	Used to express one point in time : With a certain time in the past.	• 3 years ago , Tosin was homeless.
<i>x at</i>	Used to express one point in time : With the time of the day, with noon, with night, and with midnight.	• The football match starts at 5 o'clock this evening. • Lunch at noon, anyone? • The thieves usually come out at night.
<i>x in</i>	Used to express one point in time : With parts/time of the day, with months, with seasons, and with years.	• She usually takes a nap in the afternoon. • The next board meeting will be held in August. • I can hardly wait for the snow in winter. • Our university was founded in the year 1879.
<i>x on</i>	Used to express one point in time : With the days of the week.	• The package should be there on Monday.
<i>x since</i>	Used to express a stretch of time : From a certain period (past till now).	• Significant advancements have been made in medicine since the 19 th century.
<i>x for</i>	Used to express a stretch of time : Covering a certain period (past till now)	• The rest of my family will be in South Africa for 2 months.
<i>x by</i>	Used to express a stretch of time : Up to a certain time; in the sense of <i>at the latest</i> .	• The proposal needs to be completed by Tuesday. • By 9 o'clock, I was already seeing stars.
<i>x before</i>	Used to express a stretch of time : Earlier than a certain point of time.	• Jennifer could read the newspaper before she was 6 years old.
<i>x from-to</i>	Used to express a stretch of time : Covering the beginning and end of a period of time.	• The dance troupe performed in Cape Verde from January to March.

Prepositions of Time continued

PREPOSITION	HOW IT IS USED	EXAMPLE
x <i>from-until</i>	Used to express a stretch of time : Covering the beginning and end of a period of time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The dance troupe performed in Cape Verde from January until March.

Prepositions of Space/Location

PREPOSITION	HOW IT IS USED	EXAMPLE
x <i>in</i>	Used to express a concept of place : About the point itself.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The lion that escaped the zoo was found in Rose's room.
x <i>at</i>	Used to express a concept of place : About a general area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During the weekends, you can find Clement at the movie theater.
x <i>on</i>	Used to express a concept of place : About the surface.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I left my copy of <i>Markings</i> on the table.
x <i>inside</i>	Used to express a concept of place : About something contained.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The puppy is inside the hat.
x <i>over</i>	Used to express a concept of place : About something higher than a point.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The rabbit was able to jump over the fence, barely escaping the claws of the cat.
x <i>above</i>	Used to express a concept of place : About something higher than a point.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Put the chocolate above the dresser where the children cannot reach.
x <i>under</i>	Used to express a concept of place : About something lower than a point.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The trash can is under the table.
x <i>underneath</i>	Used to express a concept of place : About something lower than a point.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you did not steal it, explain to me why I found the money underneath the blankets on your bed.
x <i>beneath</i>	Used to express a concept of place : About something lower than a point.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We hid from the rebels beneath the bushes.
x <i>below</i>	Used to express a concept of place : About something lower than a point.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The temperature today is below ten degrees Celsius.
x <i>next to</i>	Used to express a concept of place : About something being close to a point.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You'll find your wallet next to the book shelf.

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